



## SAINT CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS?

by Solange Hertz

Most Americans would be reluctant to believe that the man pictured here in the Franciscan habit is Christopher Columbus, so little does he fit into the notions current in the land he discovered. Yet this woodcut, first published in Basle in 1575 in a biographical work by the Archbishop of Nocera, was closely derived from an original made in Columbus' lifetime, which the Royal Academy of History in Madrid declared in 1862 to be the oldest and most authentic likeness in existence.

Painted on his return from his second voyage in 1493, the portrait accords perfectly with the description left us by the curate with whom he stayed in Los Palacios:

"The Admiral arrived in Castile. His dress was of the same order as that worn by the monks of St. Francis, and in shape somewhat similar to the robes of the Order, and with the rope of St. Francis around the waist for sake of devotion." By "monks" the curate referred to friars of the Strict Observance.

Needless to say, this view of the Discoverer is not emphasized in the myriad biographies written by heretics on which Catholics depend almost exclusively for information. That he was a Catholic is undeniable, but the implication has usually been that he lived in a day when he could hardly have been anything else. Thus his role in world history was gradually divested of all supernatural content and thereby falsified.

Without necessarily ascribing bad faith to his non-Catholic biographers - or the Catholic ones mesmerized by them - it must be admitted that without the light of faith, it is virtually impossible to evaluate properly either the acts or the character of a man so supernaturally motivated as Columbus actually was. Details of vast importance are overlooked, lesser ones over-stressed, and all to some degree misinterpreted.

The Columbus revealed by early Catholic biographers who knew him personally was a man who was not only not a nominal Catholic, nor even a fervent one, but very possibly a saint: His son Fernando tells us, "Of religious things he was so observant that, in fact, in saying the entire canonical office, he might be deemed a professed religious, and was such an enemy of oaths that I never heard him swear; and when he found himself most angry, his reproof was to say, 'I give you to God; why have you done or said this?' and if anything were to be written, he did not begin without first writing these words: Jesus cum Maria sit nobis in via (May Jesus with Mary be with us on the way)."

The great Fray Bartolomé Las Casas, later Bishop of Chiapas in Mexico, had this to say from his own knowledge: "He was quick-witted and gay in his speech. . . eloquent and high sounding in his business; he was moderately grave; affable towards strangers; sweet and good humored with those of his house. . . of a discreet conversation and thus able to draw love from all who saw him.

"Finally, his person and venerable mien revealed a person of great state and authority and worthy of all reverence; he was sober and moderate in his food, drink, garments and shoes. . . In matters of Christian religion no doubt he was a Catholic and of great devotion. . . He fasted with the utmost strictness when ordained by the Church; he confessed often and took Communion. . . a very devout worshipper of Our Lady and of the Seraphic Father St. Francis; he seemed to be very grateful to God for the benefits received at the divine hand, and so it was almost a proverb with him, which he quoted every hour, that God had shown him great favor, as to David. When gold or precious objects were brought to him, he entered his chapel and said, 'Let us thank God our Lord who made us worthy of discovering so much wealth.'

"He was a most jealous keeper of the honor of God; eager to convert the peoples and to see the seed and faith of Jesus Christ spread everywhere, and especially devoted to the hope that God would make him worthy of helping him in winning back the Holy Sepulchre; and in this devotion and the confidence which he had that God would help him in the discovery of this World which he promised, he begged Queen Isabel to make a vow that she should spend all the wealth gained by the Crown as a result of the discovery in winning back the land and holy house of Jerusalem, which the Queen did. . .

"He was a man of great and valorous heart, of a high mind, naturally given - as one may infer from his life and doings, and writings and conversation - to initiate great and famous enterprises; patient and very long-suffering . . . who would forgive insults, wishing no more, as it is said of him, than that those who offended him should realize their errors and that the guilty parties should be reconciled with him; most steadfast and patient in adversity and hardship, which constantly recurred and were unbelievable and untold; always trusting in divine providence, and truly, from what I heard of him and from my own father who accompanied him and served him, he always was most faithful to the King and Queen."

But who reads Las Casas? This great churchman and colonizer, who played so crucial a part in the development of the discoveries, and to whom we are indebted for the bulk of Columbus' journals, wrote one of the earliest detailed histories of America, which should be basic reading in its schools; but he has suffered the same fate as Columbus in a land where now even the last vestiges of Catholic Christendom are being ruthlessly obliterated.

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If few Americans are familiar with the foregoing descriptions of Columbus, fewer still are aware that until fairly recently Rome was seriously entertaining the possibility of canonizing him.

Foremost promoter of his cause was Pope Pius IX. Sent as a young priest to serve the Apostolic Delegate in Chile, he was the first of Christ's Vicars to set foot in the New World. He returned so convinced of Columbus' divine mission, he made it one of the first duties of his pontificate to order an official biography compiled from the wealth of original Catholic sources in an effort to correct the secularized picture of the Discoverer which even then had come to be accepted.

His choice for this work fell on Count Antoine Roselly de Lorgues, a Frenchman of Italian ancestry, who had already tackled the problem in 1844 in a book called La Croix dans les Deux Mondes. Appearing in 1856, the new biography was greeted by Christendom with such mounting enthusiasm that by 1877 the author was formally designated Postulator for the cause of the Franciscan Tertiary Christopher Columbus by letters patent from Fr. Bernardin, General of the

Franciscan Order. In this capacity de Lorgues received 910 public letters and 80 private ones from Cardinals, Bishops, Metropolitans and Apostolic Delegates from all over the world urging the Postulatum, letters subsequently deposited in the Franciscan archives in Rome. A most ardent French supporter was the future Cardinal Pie of Poitiers, famous as the admonisher of Pius IX on the dangers of his liberalism.

In a Brief commending de Lorgues for his efforts, this Pope spoke of Columbus as one who "inflamed with zeal for the Catholic faith, resolved, by undertaking the most daring of navigations, to discover a new world, not for the purpose of adding new lands to the kingdom of Spain, but to place new peoples under the reign of Christ, in other words, the Church."

Momentum continued to gather for his cause, which was much discussed between sessions of the first Vatican Council, with the Catholic press, especially *Civiltà Catolica*, keeping it before the public. The faithful generally accepted Columbus' sanctity without question.

On July 16, 1892, Leo XIII echoed his predecessor by declaring in a pontifical letter that Columbus in truth acted for the Church: Columbus noster est, "Columbus is ours." In accord with Columbus' express wishes, the Pope ordered liturgical prayers offered in honor of the Most Blessed Trinity in thanksgiving at the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery. He furthermore enjoined "all possible honors" to the discoverer.

This was acclaimed by every Christian nation but France, where Masonry by that time already ruled the episcopacy, and from whence the same cold, worldwide silence which covered Mélanie Calvat of La Salette gradually engulfed Columbus. It continues to this day. When the American historian Richard Clarke queried Rome in connection with his work, Old and New Lights on Columbus at the close of the last century, he was told, "The Sacred Congregation of Rites cannot treat of the Cause of Christopher Columbus till the diocesan processes be ended, and these have not thus far been begun." And there the matter rested. Today even Christopher's patron saint has been stricken from the Calendar.

At small loss for an explanation, Count de Lorgues shortly before his death in 1898 wrote in Les Calomnieurs Modernes du Serviteur de Dieu: "Providence willed that the greatest event on earth, the discovery of the New World, should be brought about by a Saint; and that after almost three centuries of neglect or error, in the pontificate of the first Pope to cross the Atlantic, there be revealed at last to the eyes of Christian nations the true character of the man raised up for the vastest work of human genius and divine mercy.

"But inasmuch as the historical rehabilitation ordered by the immortal Pius IX implied the glorification of Catholicism, it was deemed unbearable to the pride of freethinkers, to the enemies of the Church, to the deniers of the supernatural, who adamantly refuse God the right to meddle in affairs here below."

For a half century already battle had been raging between the forces of Christ the King with the Count at their head, and those of rationalistic humanism led by an ex-Barnabite priest, Fr. Angelo Sanguineti. Both sides loudly proclaimed, "Columbus is ours!"

De Lorgues steadfastly maintained that no one not believing in the supernatural can comprehend Columbus: "Let freethinkers be advised that Christopher Columbus' superiority was principally the result of his Catholic virtues. To judge him according to the spirit of the world, with the scientific pretensions and prejudices of our day, is both error and injustice. We have therefore presented the Revealer of the Earth as he really was, and not depicted by biographers who are enemies of the very principle which made his grandeur and glory."

Until de Lorgues wrote, even in Italy the only available popular work on Columbus was Washington Irving's, translated, abridged and adapted by Sanguineti, whose positivist, masonic leanings were well-known. Irving himself was a conscientious, honest scholar, but no Catholic, and unfortunately his researches in Spain were carried on with the assistance



of biased historians like Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete. A reading of Irving and de Lorgues together is to wonder in places whether they are writing about the same man.

Vowing to quash the canonization at all costs, Sanguinetti was later able to boast, "I, with one breath, burst that soap-bubble!" The first of many to lay before secular public opinion, without submission to Church authority, what was a purely ecclesiastical matter, he was a true forerunner of "the spirit of Vatican II." With the able help of two Freemasons, the Parisian Macaya d'Avezac and César Fernandez Duro of the Spanish Academy, he succeeded in so denigrating Columbus in the public press that the Church could not act.

When his venomous Canonization of Christopher Columbus appeared, his protector the Metropolitan Archbishop of Genoa, Columbus' own birthplace, forbade further discussion to ecclesiastics under pain of suspension, so no refutation could be made. Soon a monumental, definitive edition canonizing the lies about Columbus was published in Barcelona under the direction of José Maria Asensio, with de Lorgues' work dismissed as well-meaning, but over enthusiastic and "non-historical."

This despite the fact that the Count, who lived to be 92, published no less than eight volumes of painstaking, documented refutation of the opposition. Containing a few honest errors and perhaps some exaggerations, these still make exhilarating reading, but with the author's death it would appear that Satan had won, for Sanguinetti was followed by zealous successors, even Americans like Justin Winsor and Henry Harrisse, determined to whittle the hero down to ever smaller size in the interests of "truth", and no one of the stature of de Lorgues has risen to gainsay them.

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The major calumny around which all lesser ones revolved, accepted without question by Washington Irving and nearly all other historians, was simple enough: Columbus' alleged amour with Beatriz Enriquez de Arana in Cordova, with the consequent illegitimacy of his second son Fernando.

Not that this in itself was any bar to canonization. As de Lorgues points out, many saints have erred before rising to sanctity. It is utter falsehood, however, and was contrived out of nearly whole cloth in order to destroy a record of impeccable chastity in a man exposed to the gravest dangers to this virtue, a virtue which even his most hostile contemporaries never accused him of infringing. This was, in other words, the well-known ploy of destruction by character assassination ever dear to the controlled media.

It was based almost entirely on the fact that no marriage record has yet been found, and on the wording of Columbus' will, which refers to Beatriz merely as "mother of Don Fernando, my son," and enjoins on Diego, his elder son by his deceased first wife, to see that Beatriz "may be able to live becomingly as to one to whom I owe so much. And let this be for the unburdening of my conscience, as this weighs heavily on my heart. It is not meet to give the reason here," he concludes, signing his name as was his custom, Christo-Ferens, the "Christ-Bearer."

The lack of a marriage record proves nothing, for before the Council of Trent none was strictly required, even clandestine marriages without a priest being recognized as valid. Furthermore, an illicit liaison could hardly have been tolerated by Beatriz' family, the proud Aranas, with whom Columbus moreover always remained on the best of terms, one of their members, Pedro, marching under his banner, and another, Diego, appointed governor of his colony in Haiti. Least of all could it have been carried on in Cordova, a city whose morals Isabella kept under strictest surveillance, she whose modesty was so exemplary she succumbed to illness rather than permit physicians any exploratory diagnostic probing. Never would she have named the young Fernando as page to her own son Prince Juan as she did, had there been the slightest possibility of his illegitimacy. And had she tolerated such a thing, the envious grandes at court would have made the most of it.

Most significant, the calumny was never heard of until 72 years after Columbus' death, when his male line became extinct. He had specified that no illegitimate heir be recognized, his succession passing rather to the female line, for which reason a certain Christobal, bastard son of Luis Columbus, sought to establish his claim by alleging Fernando's illegitimacy. Being unable to produce one document or reliable witness, he lost the case.

To this day there is no evidence that any contemporary ever raised the question. On the contrary, the royal historian Antonio Herrera speaks categorically of Columbus as having been "established and married many years in Spain." He says, "He married Felipa Muniz de Perestrello" - whom he met in Lisbon at daily Mass - "and by her had Diego Colon. After the death of this first wife, he married a second called Beatriz Enriquez of the city of Cordoba by whom he had Fernando, a virtuous gentleman highly lettered." Many other historians with the facts at hand said the same. There is furthermore extant an autograph Columbus himself addressed to the Court in which he laments that because of his explorations he "left wife and children."

As for Columbus' mysterious "unburdening of conscience," at the time of his will, the reason "it was not meet to give" is supplied easily enough by Count Baldassare Colombo de Cuccaro of the Italian branch of the family, who left it all in writing with a wealth of other genealogical material. Seeking firsthand information from Beatriz' family in 1590 relating to his own standing, he learned from them that not only had Beatriz been forced to rear her son Fernando alone in Columbus' long absences, but she had also taken charge of Diego. She furthermore spent nearly all her small fortune in meeting the payments due on the expenses of Columbus' first expedition, of which Castile had paid only part.

The Admiral expected momentarily to be reimbursed by the Crown so that Beatriz' livelihood might be assured, but King Ferdinand never saw to it. Unable to provide for his wife at his death, the penniless Columbus, in recommending her to his eldest son, was too prudent to risk the royal ire by citing Ferdinand's bad faith as the true reason, but which all concerned well knew. Never did the Cuccaros then or later ever entertain the notion of Fernando's illegitimacy.

In 1672 it was nevertheless revived, this time by the pedant Antonio Nicola, with Cristobal's old lawsuit as his sole documentation. In 1792, which saw the Masonic triumph of the French Revolution, the question arose again in another lawsuit by Don Mariano Colon y Larriatequy, pretending against the incumbent of the estate. The jurist Don Perez de Castro who decided this case called the imputation "false, calumnious and without support," putting a legal end to the matter.

Thenceforth the battle was carried to the literary field, where sadly enough the first leaders seem to have been ecclesiastics from Genoa like the Dominican Giustiani, author of the polyglot vernacular Psalter - proving that no prophet has honor in his own country. Eventually the piedmontese Count Galeani Napione read a paper to the Royal Academy in Turin alleging that Columbus was never born in Genoa at all, and rehashing Fernando's illegitimacy with apparently deliberate suppression of the Cuccaro evidence. After him the errors were ably propagated by another Genoese priest called Spotorno, who trained Count de Lorgues' antagonist Fr. Sanguinetti, also from Genoa.

All in all, probably the most permanent damage to Columbus' reputation was done by the Protestant wise man Alexander von Humboldt, who publicized the Discoverer's "amorous affair" by glamorizing and excusing it, making of the well-born Beatriz a gay lady of the court rather than degrading her to common life as former detractors had done. He also informed the ignorant that Columbus never really knew what he had discovered - this in direct contradiction to passages in Columbus' own journals and letters to the effect that he had found a whole new world never known before, and that in fact another ocean lay on the other side of Panama!

"God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, of which he spoke in the Apocalypse of St. John," wrote Columbus, "after having spoken of it by the mouth of

Isaias, and He showed me where to find it." He tells the Spanish monarchs, "no princes of Spain ever acquired any land out of their own country, save now that your highnesses have here another world."

Columbus didn't "personify" his age; he made it what it was. Von Humboldt's reputation was such, however, that he easily subverted the majority of scholars. Thereafter it was merely a question of telling the same lies often enough to establish them as truth, and ignoring the ablest refutations.

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Even in his lifetime Columbus had been accused of cupidity, trafficking in human flesh, vainglory, sorcery, mismanagement, felony, sacrilege and treason, so furious was the opposition against him. The junta in Salamanca before whom he laid his theory even suspected him of heresy. Later critics like Sanguinetti, following the lead of the Protestant minister William Patterson, formulated the idea that Columbus was of no personal importance at all, for given the rise of scientific knowledge, America was bound to be discovered anyway. Today we are flooded with stories of pre-Columbian discoveries of America all serving to minimize his unique role in world history.

This continues despite the absence of any documents proving Columbus had prior natural knowledge at his disposal beyond the few words of Aristotle that "between the end of Spain and the beginning of India the sea was small and navigable in but a few days." According to the Yale scholar Edward Gaylord Bourne in Spain in America (1904), Columbus in fact left marginal notations disagreeing in the light of his own nautical experience with the opinions of Aeneas Sylvius, Pierre d'Ailly and Marco Polo, who are generally credited with inspiring him. He seemed more impressed with the apocryphal Book of Esdras which states that the earth is six parts land with only a seventh part water.

Even his correspondence with the famous Dr. Toscanelli of Florence mentioned by both Las Casas and Fernando could have yielded no solid information. Citing Vignaud, Bourne says, "In recent years the authenticity of this correspondence has been challenged, and the effort has been made to prove that the letters are a subsequent forgery designed to give Columbus' voyage the character of a reasoned scientific experiment and the dignity of the patronage of a great scholar" - rather than acknowledge its divine inspiration.

In 1939 the theory was advanced that Columbus was not even a Catholic. Disregarding the contemporary descriptions of Columbus, whose physical appearance would actually support the notion of a Viking ancestry, Professor Salvador de Madariaga claimed him for Judaism. Seeking to establish that Columbus knew Spanish long before he came to Spain, he concludes he was a Spanish Jew residing in Italy, a Marrano, that his signature reflects knowledge of kabbala, that he wanted to recover Jerusalem for the Jews, etc., etc. In 1972 the German Jew Simon Wiesenthal developed this course of thought in Sails of Hope, the Secret Mission of Columbus.

Count de Lorgues hadn't heard this one in his day, but he would hardly have been surprised. In Satan contre Christophe Colomb, he shows how organized calumny methodically followed the hero every step of his life and even beyond the grave, doubt being cast on the authenticity of his relics, last translated with religious pomp worthy of a saint into the Cathedral of Havana in 1795.

Columbus himself knew his Adversary well. Regarding his second voyage he speaks in his journal for January 6, 1493 of "Satan, desiring to prevent this trip, as always until now." Space forbids recounting the extraordinary difficulties he encountered, not only from men and the elements, but from crippling illnesses and near blindness, all of which are a matter of sober record.

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Columbus was not merely the Discoverer of America, but perhaps more properly its Apostle. We must bear in mind that two popes have specifically declared his mission as of the Church, and several others have done as much by implication. There is no natural explanation for him.

He often referred to the exclusively religious character of his enterprise, as is clear from the letter addressed to Raphael Sanchez: "This great and vast undertaking is due to no merit of mine. It is due to the holy Catholic faith, to the piety and religion of our monarchs. For the Lord has granted men what human intelligence could neither conceive nor attain." He bids the monarchs: "And now ought the King, Queen, Princes and all their dominions, as well as the whole of Christendom, to give thanks to our Savior Jesus Christ who has granted us such a victory and great success.

"Let processions be ordered, let solemn festivals be celebrated, let the churches be filled with boughs and flowers. Let Christ rejoice upon earth as He does in heaven, to witness the coming salvation of so many people, heretofore given over to perdition. Let us rejoice for the exaltation of our faith, as well as for the augmentation of our temporal prosperity, in which not only Spain but all Christendom shall participate!"

At the close of his first voyage, thinking still he had only reached the back door to the Indies, he addresses "Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians and princes who love and promote the holy Christian faith, and are enemies of the doctrine of Mahomet and of all idolatry and heresy, determined to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the above-mentioned countries of India, to see the said princes, people and territories, and to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith . . . So after having expelled the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses in the same month of January ordered me to proceed. . . ."

He sailed on a Friday In Nomine Domini Jesu Christi, with the figure of Christ on the Cross flying from the mast of his flagship the Santa Maria. Throughout the voyage the Salve Regina was sung every evening, and when land was sighted at 2 A.M. on Friday, October 12, 1492, Columbus immediately ordered the Te Deum intoned. At daybreak the Cross was planted and the island named San Salvador.

Here and elsewhere Columbus always took possession in the name of Christ the King for the Crown of Castile with the singing of the Vexilla Regis. Reformation authors often deliberately deleted these Cross plantings, which they chose to regard as simple ceremonies of taking possession, despite the fact that Columbus himself, speaking of Hispaniola (Haiti), remarked these were "principally in token of Jesus Christ our Savior and in honor of Christianity." Clearly he considered himself the chosen precursor of the Good News in the New World, remarking in the Indian villages on "stones suitable for the construction of churches."

He warns his sovereigns, "I say that Your Highnesses must allow no stranger to set foot in this land and trade here who is not a Catholic Christian," so well did he understand the nature of the false ecumenism even then brewing with the Reformation. He adds, "and no Spaniard to come if he is not truly a Christian, inasmuch as the planning and execution of this undertaking has no other purpose but the increase and glory of the Christian religion." Speaking of converting the natives, he held that "the instant missionaries are able to speak their language, they will become Christians. I hope in Our Lord that Your Highnesses will decide promptly to send some, so as to join so numerous a people to the Church." He desired them to be treated with the greatest respect, "because they are the best people in the world, and especially because I have great hope in Our Lord that Your Highnesses will make them Christians."

Far from wishing to make slaves of the Indians, on his second voyage he seriously entertained the thought of declaring war on their cannibal Carib neighbors in their defense, being prevented only by illness and lack of materiel, nor could he bear to see mistreated those "bought with the very Blood of Christ." One of his first projects in Haiti was a theological

college which was to serve as the propaganda center for evangelization of the entire New World. In the gold mines of Veragua he would permit only workers of good morals, because the gold, said he, was destined for Jesus Christ - to the great disgust of the many hidalgos who had enlisted with him only to get rich quick.

We hear little of what may have been Columbus' gift of miracles, for instance the "miracle of the arrows" following his prayer during a Carib uprising, nor how, armed with the first chapter of St. John's Gospel he exorcised a typhoon. His clever use of an impending eclipse of the moon, whereby he persuaded reluctant Indians to feed his starving men is sometimes cited as proof of his craftiness, but without telling us the idea came to him in answer to desperate prayer. Nor has there been any satisfactory human explanation of how he withstood mutiny all alone in the wilds.

Rarely mentioned is the "voice from on high" which spoke to him during his last dereliction in Jamaica at the age of 66, when he was violently tempted to despair:

"Oh fool, man slow to believe and to serve thy God, God of all! What more did He do for Moses or for David His servant? From thy birth He always took great care of thee. When He saw thee of an age which satisfied Him, marvellously did He make thy name resound in the Earth. The Indies, which are part of the world, so rich, He gave them to thee as thine; thou gavest them to whomsoever thou didst please, and He gave thee power to do so. Of the shackles of the Ocean Sea, which were bound with such strong chains, He gave thee the keys; and thou wast obeyed in so many lands and didst win such honored renown amongst Christians!

"What more did He do for the people of Israel when He led them out of Egypt? Nor for David, whom from a shepherd He raised to be King of Judea? Turn thy face to Him and know thy error at last: His mercy is boundless: thy age shall not hinder great things: He has many very great mansions. Abraham was over a hundred when he begat Isaac, and Sarah, was she a girl? Thou callest out for uncertain help: answer, who has afflicted thee so much and so often, God or the world?

"The privileges and promises which God gives, He breaks them not, nor does He say, after He has received the service, that His intention was different and that it must be understood in another way, nor does He give martyrdom to anyone in order to lend some color to sheer force: He sticks to the letter; all He promises He fulfills, and more: is this customary? I have said what thy Creator has done for thee and does for all. Now He will show some of the reward of this anxiety and danger which thou hast undergone serving others."

Columbus writes, "I heard all half-asleep, but I had no answer for such truthful words, save to weep for my errors. He ended speaking, whoever he was, saying, 'Fear not. Be trustful. All these tribulations are written on marble stone and not without cause.' "

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Extraordinary as are Columbus' nautical exploits, they were the mere outer framework of his life. Not only did he write poetry, but he accumulated vast learning, as is evident in his writings, replete with Scriptural quotations and allusions to flora and fauna, besides calculations so accurate he was able to predict the exact location of the future Panama Canal and the equatorial tides and currents. As Bourne remarks, his reports to Spain were singularly devoid of visionary schemes, on the contrary showing to great advantage the practical side of his abilities in the most varied situations, in fact forecasting some of the best features of the excellent Spanish colonial system.

Columbus was a man of action such as only a contemplative can be. It is not strictly true to say he was the sole discoverer of America, for in the real spiritual sense there were in fact three: Columbus; Isabella the Catholic, Queen of Castile; and Fray Juan Perez de la Marchena, Prior of the Franciscan monastery of La Rabida. All believed in his divine mission, working and praying for its accomplishment. All three were Franciscans, for like Columbus, Isabella was also a Franciscan Tertiary.



When Columbus, widowed and penniless, was looking for a sponsor, it was Fray Juan who gave him a cell for asylum and later cared for his son Diego until Columbus could remarry. As former confessor to the Queen, he was able to put him in personal contact with Isabella, between whom there seems to have sprung up immediately the kind of unspoken accord found between saints. A letter from her to Columbus dated August 16, 1494 was the first to reach the New World from the Old. It begins in part:

"We render lively thanks to Our Lord. We hope that with His help this work of yours will cause our holy Catholic faith to be greatly extended," and it attests to Columbus' gift for prophecy, stating, "And it seems to us that everything which from the very outset you told us would happen, has for the most part taken place, with as much precision as if you had seen it happen before you told us." The deepest spiritual rapport always existed between this noble woman and the great Christo-Ferens.

As for Padre Juan, true spiritual father of the Discovery, he offered the first Mass of Thanksgiving for it. Unlike the other Padre Antonio de la Marchena, who contrived to accompany Columbus on his next voyage as astronomer and was privileged to offer the first Mass on the new seas and the new world, Padre Juan played a more hidden, more powerful role, of which much remains to be said. Columbus retired for long periods to La Rabida, and Fray Juan is certainly one of the "two friars" Columbus wrote of "who were always constant" when everyone else "regarded (his) project as a burlesque." It was from La Rabida that Columbus wrote to tell the Pope about his discovery, expressing the desire to be able within seven years to raise an army of 5,000 horse and 50,000 foot-soldiers to deliver the Holy Sepulchre.

He had been keeping this end in view when he had exacted from the Spanish monarchs the stiff terms of which he often reminded them that "thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and the perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents which I might discover and acquire, or which may hereafter be discovered and acquired in the ocean; and that this dignity should be inherited by my eldest son, and thus descend from degree to degree forever."

Here we see why Columbus wished to guarantee his succession by marrying a second time. Far from being guilty of the vainglory imputed to him by his detractors, he rather gauged accurately the revolutionary state of Europe, knowing what would happen to the new lands if they were left open to political chicanery. Columbus' will furthermore stipulated that, besides the needs of his family, revenues from the Viceroyalty were to provide for a chapel and hospital in Haiti, for the enlistment and equipment of an army for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, plus the maintenance of the Spanish sovereignty and aid to the Holy See in case of schism or other trouble.

Columbus knew well the crafty Ferdinand, who was in no way dominated by the saintly motives of his wife Isabella. As soon as the discovery was a reality Ferdinand began laboring to shear Columbus of his powers, offering him a pensioned domain in Castile in exchange for his contract. Columbus refused, standing on his rights for the most altruistic of motives, but eventually a descendant capitulated, accepting the titles of Duke of Veragua and Marquis of Jamaica. (Sad to relate, a later descendant who fancied breeding bulls, consented to appear as a main attraction at the Chicago World's Fair in 1892. He was fortunately declared bankrupt after offering 30,000 francs to whoever would write a new biography of his ancestor from which all supernatural overtones would be removed.)

When Columbus attempted the circumnavigation of the globe with his fourth and last voyage, he was broken in health and the prey of his enemies, driven to beg for his just wages, supporting from his own pocket sailors (even mutineers) whose salaries the government would not pay, and dogged at every step by insubordination and treachery. At home those who betrayed him were rewarded with good jobs; those faithful to him could not find employment. In the colonies the Crown after 1497 welcomed even criminals, with the exception of "heretics, traitors, counterfeiters and sodomites," with the results one would expect.

Columbus was ground between two millstones, the colonists complaining he would not subject the Indians to them (especially the hidalgos, who refused to do manual labor) and his enemies at court accusing him of enslaving the natives - all exploited to the fullest by the naval bureaucracy in Seville controlled by his arch-enemy Bishop Juan de Fonseca. As we know he was eventually tried in absentia and brought back to Spain in chains, a "temporary" governor appointed in his place; yet it is characteristic of him that he hung the chains in his room ever after and desired them to be buried with him.

So persuasive were his enemies, perhaps even using forged documents against him, that even the great Isabella for a moment wavered in her allegiance, but only until she saw him again. It is said that in a last private interview they both wept together helplessly in the face of the reign of terror even then being established in America over the souls they labored to redeem. When Isabella died in 1504, he was left without further recourse.

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Whether or not Columbus is a saint is a matter for the Pope's decision. What makes it of such grave concern to Christ's enemies today as yesterday lies in its enormous political implications, its threat to "democracy."

The memory of Columbus must be obliterated or at least neutralized, and in the United States of the America he discovered, the task is nearly accomplished. In schoolbooks man-made heroes of the Masonic enlightenment have slowly but systematically replaced those Catholic pioneers who came, not to establish a government "of the people for the people by the people," but a government of Christ the King. What American child now hears, for instance, of the Spanish missionaries martyred in Virginia? They are led to believe that this state has always belonged to heretics and that American history began with the takeover in 1776.

Not only did Columbus discover and bestow on Spain this half of the globe, with his descendants designated viceroys in perpetuity, but the donation was immediately and solemnly ratified by the Vicar of Christ on this same globe. By three bulls in May and September, 1493, Alexander VI drew from north to south through the Atlantic a line of demarcation east of which Portugal might retain all her former possessions, but south and west of which Spain was granted exclusive right to all lands not yet occupied by any Christian prince.

The line was most probably suggested by Columbus, for it is substantially the line of no magnetic variations where his compass deflected and pointed to the true north for the first time in history, the magnetic pole and the north star being for the moment in conjunction at that point. By the treaty of Tordesillas a year later the line was shifted some degrees by mutual consent, so that Portugal was later able to claim Brazil, but the Demarcation itself still stands. Columbus scrupulously abided by it on his later voyages, for thus had Christ's Vicar ruled. It has never been abrogated.

The power Alexander exercised here as supreme head of humanity has never been formally defined by the Church, but it has been universally recognized and appealed to from earliest times. Whoever doubts this is invited to view the eighth century mosaic at the Lateran where St. Peter is pictured giving the pallium to Pope Leo III with his right hand, and the standard to Charlemagne with his left. The legal worth in God's eyes of the many governments, wars and treaties nations have perpetrated among themselves from the Reformation until now, without reference to the Papacy, may be easily conjectured.

Archbishop Kenrick of Baltimore, in his polemical Primacy of the Apostolic See Vindicated, says of the Demarcation Line, "It should not surprise us that the right to give, as it were, a charter for the discovery of unknown lands to a national corporation in a Christian confederacy should be recognized in him whose office imposed on him the duty of spreading the Gospel throughout all nations." There is no divorcing the temporal from the spiritual.

Pertinent here are some words of St. Pius X in Il fermo proposito: "The civilization of the world is Christian; the more it is purely Christian, the truer, more lasting, and more productive of genuine fruit it is. The more it draws away from the Christian ideal, the more it seriously endangers the social order. Hence, by the very nature of things, the Church has in fact become the guardian and protector of Christian society. Such a fact was universally recognized and admitted in other periods of history; in fact it formed a solid foundation for civil legislation. Upon that very fact was founded the relation between Church and State; the public recognition of the authority of the Church in those matters which touched upon conscience in any manner, the subordination of all the laws of the State in securing the temporal welfare of the people in such a way that their eternal welfare did not suffer.

" . . . What prosperity and well-being, what peace and harmony, what respectful subjection to authority and what excellent government would be obtained and maintained in the world, if one could see in practice the perfect ideal of Christian civilization! However, granting the continual battle of the flesh against the spirit, of darkness against light, of Satan against God, such cannot be hoped for, at least in all its fullness. Hence raids are continually being made on the peaceful conquests of the Church, the sadness and pain of which are accentuated by the fact that society tends more and more to be governed by principles opposed to that very Christian ideal, and is even in danger of completely falling away from God."

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Lately Columbus has been eclipsed by science's most strenuous effort to date: a voyage to the moon. Typically a work of unaided human intelligence devoid of supernatural moorings - with the exception of a few verses of Scripture tossed out on the approach to the lunar shores -- it is a masterpiece of rational organization hatched by the chastest mathematical calculations. It must have been in the full light of his prophetic office that Pope Paul VI hailed it on February 7, 1971 in a parody of a hymn to Christ the King:

Honor to Man;  
Honor to his thought; honor to his scientific knowledge;  
Honor to his technical skill; honor to his work;  
Honor to human endurance;  
Honor to that combination of scientific activity and organization by  
which man, unlike the other animals, can invest his spirit and  
his manual dexterity with instruments of conquest;  
HONOR TO MAN, KING OF THE EARTH, AND TODAY PRINCE OF THE HEAVENS!

It is significant that what the moon probe "discovered" was known to be there already, shining in the night above us since childhood. Beautiful from a distance in its properly reflected light, on contact it proved to be dust. Dark, cold, sterile, uninhabited, of itself it can never yield souls for Christ. Science discovered no new world at all, but merely the cellar door to the old one. And some do not believe we got there at all.

The world found by Columbus was living and vibrant, full of peoples and natural treasures brought to fullness awaiting Christ's transfiguration. Drawn from the flank of the old world while it slept, God presented it to European Christendom much as He gave Eve to Adam, or as He added the New Testament to the Old, for the greater perfection of His first creation. America was indeed meant to be as Columbus said, the new heaven and new earth of the Apocalypse prefigured here below.



What happened to her? There is no "raid on the peaceful conquests of the Church" of which St. Pius spoke to compare with the rape of America by the criminals, heretics and freethinkers who flocked and proliferated on her shores to destroy her in the name of freedom and brotherhood, corrupting Christ's own colonies with man-made "democracy."

The words her anguished discoverer penned in his poignant "littera rarissima" during his last voyage might today be her own: "Hitherto I have wept for others; but now, have pity on me, Heaven, and weep for me, O earth! . . . Weep for me, whoever has charity, truth and justice!"



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